

A man who knew whereof he spoke. Commentary on Dunkin, P. (1962) The development of technical services training.

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In “The Development of Technical Services Training,” Paul Dunkin writes “I BEGIN with Robert Frost.” I, for my part, shall begin with Paul Dunkin.

Paul Shaner Dunkin (1905–1975) was:

- Educated in Classics and Library Science;
- Senior Cataloger at the Folger Shakespeare Library, and then its Chief of Technical Services;
- Professor of Library Science at Rutgers;
- President of RTSD (ALA’s Resources and Technical Services Division, now ALCTS);
- Editor of *LRTS (Library Resources and Technical Services)*, succeeding its Founding Editor, the legendary Esther Piercy;
- Awarded the Margaret Mann Citation in 1968; and
- Named one of the 100 Most Important People in Library Science. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_S._Dunkin)

He was, in other words, a man who knew whereof he spoke when it came to Technical Services. In the beginning of “The Development of Technical Services Training,” Dunkin poses a series of questions, some more rhetorical than others. Is Technical Services an intellectual concept or an administrative device? Can the routines and rules of Technical Services be taught in school? Should they be? What is

the relative place of theory and practice in education? As he asks in this paper “Do we want the ant’s-eye view or the prophet’s dream?” (p. 126).

While not answering any of these directly, it is clear he thought too much attention was focused on practice, and not enough on theory—though there was room, and need, for both. Describing the history of the development of Technical Services training (note that the article’s title refers to “Training,” not “Education”), he observes that it was first associated with public libraries and only subsequently with universities. It was first practical and clerical. It only subsequently becomes theoretical and general. It focused on cataloging, selection/acquisitions, serials, and bibliography—especially cataloging. He concludes this part of his historical flyover with the following: “Broadly speaking, after some thirty-five years devoted to the practical details of the technical services, they have spent another thirty-five years groping, sometimes blindly, toward the theory of technical services” (p.129).

Turning his attention to the textbooks that accompany the Technical Services curriculum, Dunkin notes that they run the gamut from “straightforward instructions” (Akers), to theoretical/practical combinations (Mann), to encyclopedic surveys (Tauber). All, he observes, go out of date quickly, going so far as to describe a volume like Tauber’s *Technical Services in Libraries* (on which the present

author was raised, as it were) as “alas . . . out of date the minute it is published” (p. 129). [The volume remains in my personal library, nevertheless.] He is especially critical of the plethora of cataloging and classification tools. While he praises Cutter (1904) for including catalog “objects” (i.e., objectives), rules for accomplishing those objects, and reasons for those rules, he criticizes ALA (1908, 1941, 1949) for an increasing focus on rules, with inadequate attention to the reasoning behind those rules. While complementing Library of Congress (1949) for including principles, he criticizes their rules as needlessly complex (which might explain their eventually becoming overwhelmed by LC’s own rule interpretations). Finally, he finds fault with Lubetzky’s revision of the 1949 LC rules because it too omitted the reasons behind the rules. The Sears and LC lists of subject headings are, he notes, just that—lists—and the classification schedules are no better. “. . . in spite of the trend toward theory in the schools,” he concludes, “the textbooks remain largely how-to-do-it manuals” (p.130).

And so . . . fast forward to the present. While a lot of what Dunkin had to say in 1962 is still true enough—the lineage from Osborn’s “The Crisis in Cataloging” (1941) to Greene and Meissner’s “More Product, Less Process” (2005) is pretty obvious, at least in intent—the world that library technical services now inhabits is so very different from that it inhabited 50+ years ago. At both micro and macro levels, that world is a much, much more complex place.

- *Data*: Content is available in many more formats. As the authors of LC21 (2000) observed: “The multitude of electronic databases, the rapid growth of websites, the increase in the number of electronically available print journals, and the availability of numerous full-text resources . . . represent a dramatic change in the dissemination of scholarly and cultural content” (p. 43). They did so in a section of their report

titled “Digital Revolution, Library Evolution,” fully aware, no doubt, that that revolution was still gathering steam. Digital objects have now entered the equation: images, sound, text; moving, still; simple, complex. Data sets, the raw material of science and scholarship, are also entering the equation.

- *Discovery*: Cataloging has long not been the sole discovery mechanism relied on by a library’s users. On the contrary, cataloging metadata now needs to be brought together with full text article-level metadata, archival finding aid metadata, and digital object metadata in a single coherent, navigable display. Each of these metadata types is created according to different standards, and some are created outside the library (e.g., article-level metadata are usually created by publishers; metadata for research data may be created by faculty, at least in part).
- *Delivery*: Fulfillment options—whether on the supply side (purchase, license, borrow, scan, print on demand) or the demand side (check out, view, download)—are now multi-modal. And increasingly, they are expected to be integrated with Discovery.

In fact, integration is the order of the day, together with infrastructure. No longer is a library a tub on its own bottom. OCLC, cooperative cataloging programs, and the World Wide Web—amongst others—combined to change that. Libraries and library technical services now operate at the network level, as part of an ecosystem in which collaboration and interdependence are not four letter words. As the spectrum of stewardship challenges confronting library collections services has expanded, so too have opportunities to join with other ecosystem players in addressing them. (Yes, “technical services” are now frequently referred to as “collections services,” another indicator of the expansive view called for by integration and collaboration.)

What, then, are the implications for library science education? Janet Swan Hill (2007) has observed that:

... education provides the foundation of principles that will last throughout a career, while training builds on that foundation in ways that may be library-specific ... the details of library operations will inevitably change and evolve with the evolution of the field and the society within which it exists (p. 43).

I concur and say, therefore, in response to Dunkin's questions: Yes ... provide theory and practice, principles and application—always, however, with an emphasis on the former, as the library itself is better positioned to supply the latter. Perhaps as importantly, leaven both with a healthy dose of context. As much as anything, collections services librarians need exposure to the rich complexity of the ecosystem in which they will be working:

- FRBR, RDA, Dublin Core, EAD, DCRM(B), BibFrame;
- BIBCO, CONSER, NACO, SACO;
- Linked Open Data, RDF triples, VIVO;
- Open Access (green and gold), Open Data, Open Educational Resources;
- ArchivesSpace, CollectionsSpace, DuraSpace, Fedora;

- LOCKSS, CLOCKSS, Portico, Dura-Cloud, DPN;
- JSTOR, Internet Archive, HathiTrust, WEST.

I could go on, but as Dunkin notes when discussing Tauber, the list will be out of date by the time this article is published anyway. That's not important. What's important is recognizing, understanding, and appreciating the context in which library work transpires: an ecosystem that includes many more, and many more different, stakeholders today than it did fifty years ago.

Selected References

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